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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 009364

SIPDIS

GENEVA PLEASE PASS TO JEFF DE LAURENTIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2014
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [SNAR](#) [KJUS](#) [CVIS](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: U/S GROSSMAN'S MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENT URIBE AND
VP SANTOS

REF: A. BOGOTA 7901

[B](#). BOGOTA 8193
[C](#). BOGOTA 9192
[D](#). BOGOTA 7831

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Milton K. Drucker for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. On September 9, Under Secretary for Political Affairs Marc Grossman had separate meetings with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and Vice-President Francisco Santos in Cartagena. Grossman thanked Uribe and Santos for their efforts to secure the safe release of the three American hostages held by the FARC. He also congratulated them on progress on human rights cases and called for much more. Grossman said he would not be able to make immediate changes on U.S. business visa policies or the travel advisory for Colombia. Both Uribe and Santos asked for additional funding for demobilization and said the FARC is showing signs of weakness. The peace process with the AUC remains complicated, but there has been some progress toward possible talks with the ELN. Santos said the fall of the U.S. dollar was affecting export industries, while Uribe expressed concern that the tourism industry in Cartagena was suffering because of the U.S. travel warning. Both said the USG should recognize the legitimacy of the Chavez administration in Venezuela while maintaining pressure on the GOV regarding good governance and relations with the political opposition. End Summary.

Human Rights

[1](#)2. (C) Grossman congratulated Uribe and Santos on the administration's many human rights progress, notably arrests in the Arauca union murders case (refs A and B), the effort to move the Mapiiripan case to Bogota, and the decision to hold high-level meetings with NGOs. Grossman stressed the need for even more progress on human rights, highlighting the importance of eliminating impunity for military leaders guilty of human rights violations or collusion with paramilitaries. He also highlighted U.S. concerns over the prosecution of Lieutenant Colonel Orozco in the Mapiiripan case, providing Uribe with a chronology of events to explain the USG's position.

[1](#)3. (C) Uribe said he would raise the Orozco case with Prosecutor General Osorio and pass on our concerns and the chronology of events. (Later that day Osorio provided information on two human rights cases reported in ref C.)

[1](#)4. (C) Uribe expressed frustration that NGOs are not interested in hearing his side on human rights issues, but are instead promoting their own political agendas. Grossman stressed the important role that NGOs can play and supported Uribe's invitation to bring more NGOs to Colombia. Grossman congratulated Uribe on the meeting between the Military High Command and the NGO community on August 5, and on Uribe's meeting with Amnesty International (ref D). Both were credited in the public eye as successes in improving dialogue on human rights.

Humanitarian Exchange with the FARC

[1](#)5. (C) U/S Grossman thanked Uribe for his efforts to secure the safe release of the three U.S. hostages being held by the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Uribe admitted that the offer for a humanitarian exchange with the FARC, initiated by Switzerland, was a surprise. His first reaction was to refuse the offer because the FARC wanted to obtain the release of high-level leaders convicted of atrocities. He eventually decided, however, that if the FARC released all of its political hostages he would be willing to release an equal number of low-level FARC members charged only with rebellion. He explained that he does not have the legal authority to release those convicted of violent crime. He also wants the released prisoners to either be resettled in France, or participate in reintegration programs in Colombia. He repeated his earlier commitments to insist that any exchange with the FARC include the American hostages. Vice-President Santos was pessimistic that Uribe's position on reintegration would be feasible, and predicted that the return of FARC members to combat would be a demoralizing blow to the military. Santos added that the hostages issue is hurting Uribe's image and chances for reelection.

Demobilization and Peace Processes

16. (C) Uribe was pleased to report that for the first time his sources tell him the FARC is under pressure from Plan Patriota Phase 2B. Santos said the COLMIL would soon be sending a mobile brigade into Arauca. Both Uribe and Santos said they had overestimated the strength of the FARC. Grossman said the USG has been pleased with the number of terrorist deserters, but Santos countered that numbers are likely to decrease, since the remaining fighters are more dedicated to their cause.

17. (C) Santos said peace negotiations with the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) are not going smoothly because the AUC does not really want to demobilize. He opined that AUC leaders are more worried about extradition to the U.S. than leaving a power vacuum that could be exploited by the FARC. He expressed concern that if peace talks with the AUC break down, "it could get bloody."

18. (C) Santos said incipient peace negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN) are going more smoothly. The GOC sent a letter to the ELN in June regarding terms for a peace settlement. (Note: The ELN responded to the GOC in writing on September 6 (septel). End note).

19. (C) Uribe said the GOC needs the USG's help to reintegrate former fighters from illegal armed groups. Roughly 6,000 members of the FARC, ELN, and AUC have voluntarily demobilized and need to be reintegrated into Colombian society. Grossman assured Uribe that demobilization is a high priority for the USG, that we have committed USD 275,000 towards demobilization, and plan to add another USD 300,000.

Free Trade Agreement

10. (C) Grossman told Uribe the U.S. supports efforts to attract U.S. investors to Colombia, including events such as promotions in New York City on September 29 and Miami on September 30. Uribe said he has been criticized recently for his support of the free trade agreement (FTA) with the U.S., specifically because of the difficulty many Colombian nationals have obtaining business visas to the U.S. Charge d'Affaires informed Uribe that Embassy officers would be meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the following day to discuss business visas. Grossman said the Embassy would do what it could to facilitate the visa application process, but added that it would not be helpful to link an FTA and visa issuances.

11. (C) Uribe said he believes the biggest obstacle to implementing the FTA will be agreement on agricultural exports. Santos said the fall in the value of the dollar against the peso was putting pressure on agricultural exporters in the coffee, banana, cotton, and finished textile export sectors, which have all laid off workers because of decreases in production. Otherwise, said Santos, the Colombian economy is doing well. He said the growing deficit in the pension system is the only major fiscal policy issue at the moment.

Extradition

12. (C) Uribe reiterated his support for extradition of criminals to the U.S., but said he did not want it to become an issue in his campaign for reelection. He asked that the USG ensure that prison sentences for criminals extradited from Colombia not be longer than allowed under Colombian law, and that extradited individuals be convicted for acts that considered crimes in Colombia. Grossman said we had received the message delivered to Secretary Powell in Panama and that

we are working to improve our mutual understanding of both legal systems. Uribe accepted Grossman's suggestion of a visit by a senior DOJ official to Bogota.

Venezuela

13. (C) Grossman asked for Uribe's and Santos' views on engagement with the administration of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Both stressed the importance of recognizing Chavez as president, but also noted the need to pressure him privately on good governance and keeping doors open with the political opposition. Uribe said we need to cooperate with Venezuela on counternarcotics and counterterrorism where we can. Santos said we should work hard to assure that the 2006 elections are free and fair. He also asked the USG to work with the GOV on security and border issues, as kidnappers tend to move easily across the border and police/military cooperation is weak, especially at higher levels.

Security in Cartagena and the USG Travel Warning

14. (C) President Uribe took advantage of the venue to comment on overall improvements to security in Colombia and his desire to see U.S.-flag cruise ships return to Cartagena. He asked Grossman if it would be possible to make an exception to the travel warning for Colombia to highlight the relative security of Cartagena. Grossman said our first priority is the safety of U.S. citizens and did not commit to change the travel warning in the near term, but agreed to convey these concerns in Washington. Uribe said that the population of Cartagena has swollen from 500,000 in 1990 to almost 1 million people today, mostly reflecting internally displaced persons (IDPs). Unemployment is high, and Uribe would like to attract more international visitors to Cartagena and stimulate tourism.

Request for Assistance with Money Laundering Education

15. (C) Santos passed a request to Grossman from the Ministry of Finance for USG assistance. The MOF's financial intelligence unit (UIAF) is seeking funding for a program to educate the public about money laundering. The program would elicit phone calls through posters or handbills offering pesos at a favorable exchange rate. Callers would be informed that they are playing a dangerous game, and told how money laundering affects the economy. Santos said the campaign is important, because many Colombians do not consider purchasing currency on the black market to be a crime. Ignorance of money laundering's real consequences was a major reason why public reaction to "Operation White Dollar", a sting operation that led to several high-profile arrests on money laundering charges, was overwhelmingly negative.
DRUCKER

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